

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet
AUTHOR: Housing and Environmental Services Director

9 March 2006

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

Purpose

1. This report sets out what actions have been taken in implementing the Council's Protection of vulnerable adults (POVA) policy and recommends further actions.

Background

2. In July 2004 Council adopted a 'Protection of vulnerable adults from abuse' policy. The policy (attached as **Appendix A**) sets out how the Council will endeavour to ensure that its staff and elected members are aware of the warning signs of vulnerable adult abuse and know how to refer such matters to the County Council or police for further investigation and action.
3. A managers' survey carried out in May 2005 suggested that a number of service areas already had procedures in place for staff. The sheltered housing service, homelessness service, home improvement agency, and community services had arranged appropriate staff training and were aware of resources available to help staff detect vulnerable adult abuse and refer on to the appropriate agencies.
4. However significant other service areas, for example neighbourhood management, housing technical services, environmental health and revenues services did not have high awareness of this issue and had not used training resources provided through the County Council's vulnerable adults services.
5. A training session was organised for service managers in June 2005 at which County Council officers offered presentations on vulnerable adult and child protection issues. As far as possible the Council's lead officers on vulnerable adults (Director of Housing & Environmental Services) and child protection (Head of Community Services) have coordinated implementation of the Council's policies in these two areas, recognising that the same groups of employees are most likely to encounter issues concerning either vulnerable adult or child abuse.
6. A number of issues emerged from the training session that required further action:
 - The identification of 'high risk' activities and posts ie those where evidence of vulnerable adult abuse was most likely to be encountered.
 - Recruitment procedures and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks
 - Induction and ongoing staff training
 - Raising awareness of this issue

- Ensuring that organisations which have relations with the Council eg contractors, grant aided organisations, are made aware of the Council's policies in respect of vulnerable adults.
7. The Council is represented on the Cambridgeshire Vulnerable Adult Protection Committee through a District Council representative (currently Fenland DC), at which levels of activity are reported and policies developed.
 8. The County Council's 'Protection of vulnerable adults from abuse - annual report 2004/05' states that, over the year, 335 cases of vulnerable adult abuse were reported in Cambridgeshire (of which 175 cases were proven, 53 were not proven, 24 were still under investigation and 83 were inconclusive). 58 of the 335 cases originated in South Cambridgeshire. None involved Council staff.

Actions required

9. The diverse nature of the Council's services means that some officers are more likely to come across vulnerable adult abuse situations than others. Those officers whose role involves regularly visiting residents in their home are most likely to have to apply the vulnerable adults policy. These staff, and their managers, require higher levels of knowledge and are referred to in this report as 'priority' staff (see **Appendix B**)

Training requirements

10. Priority staff are those whose responsibilities are most likely to lead them to encounter vulnerable adult abuse. Priority posts are listed at appendix B. These postholders have already received specialist training from the County Council and it is proposed that for priority posts in the following services, specialist training continues to be provided:
 - Homelessness
 - Sheltered housing
 - Home Improvement Agency
 - Community Services
11. For relevant staff in the following services (usually those who visit residents in their home) it is proposed that briefings be organised in conjunction with the County Council. It had been hoped to combine vulnerable adults and child protection procedure briefings but advice from the County Council suggests that this would not be appropriate.
 - Environmental Health
 - Revenues
 - Housing Services incl Direct Labour Organisation
12. The County Council recently requested all partner organisations to contribute in excess of £10,000 towards a new county wide training strategy. That request was refused but there will be a charge for courses attended by the Council's staff. A more cost effective solution tailored to the needs of Council staff will better meet the Council's needs while increasing awareness of the issue, an important element of the County Council's policy.

13. The Council has not set aside specific monies to fund these training requirements for 2006/07, so any training carried out next year will have to be funded from departmental training budgets.
14. A County Council leaflet '*Protection of vulnerable adults – what to do if you think someone is being abused*' has been circulated to all priority staff and all Council service managers and elected members.

Employee Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks

15. Priority staff are CRB checked (at enhanced level) prior to the commencement of their employment. However a number of staff who have been employed by the Council for some years will not necessarily have been CRB checked as their employment may have preceded current checking procedures (although they should have been subject to those police check arrangements that existed prior to the current procedures).
16. At February 2006, 83 of the 163 posts identified at Appendix B have been CRB checked. Reorganisation of the sheltered housing service will reduce the number of 'priority' posts and will enable new checks to be undertaken of all newly appointed staff. It is proposed that any remaining staff who have not been CRB checked have their consent sought and checks undertaken in 2006/07. Further, a number of additional posts that involve home visiting are to be added to the list of CRB check posts (see Appendix B).
17. The cost of CRB checks is £31 for a standard check and £36 for an enhanced check. The approximate financial requirement for ensuring that all current postholders have up to date CRB checks taking into account 5.2 above is up to £2500.
18. The Council already has in place a CRB disclosure policy and procedure which sets out the need to risk assess posts and arrange, as part of the recruitment procedure, the appropriate CRB check. Provision is made within the policy to check CRB records every three years. The HR team will ensure that three yearly checks are undertaken using the establishment list as a record of last CRB check dates.
19. There is no requirement, and it is not believed necessary, to arrange CRB checks for all elected members at this time.

Equal opportunities implications

20. In line with general and specific statutory duties under the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Council operates a Race Equality Scheme (RES) in order to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote race equality and good race relations. The RES gives priority to actions relating to travellers as the biggest ethnic minority in the district (at 1.7% of the district's population).
21. The following services mentioned in this report in terms of their relevance to the POVA policy, have also been assessed, via the RES, as being highly relevant to the duty to promote racial equality: Traveller site management; Community Safety, Revenues & Benefits; and Homelessness and Housing Advice.

Recommendations

22. It is recommended that
- (a) progress with implementation of the Council's Protection of Vulnerable Adults policy is noted,
 - (b) further training for priority staff and briefings for other staff and elected members be arranged, the resources for which be allocated from departmental and corporate training budgets respectively from 2006/07, and
 - (c) CRB checks continue to be undertaken for all new priority staff and reviewed every three years, and that consent is sought from all 'priority' postholders for CRB checks to be undertaken in 2006/07 if they have not previously been checked under current procedures.

Background papers

Protection of Vulnerable Adults from abuse – Annual Report 2004/05 Cambridgeshire County Council (www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk)